



Adam Van Dusen

Caroline Childs Van Dusen



# THE VAN DUSENS OF ASTORIA

Written and compiled by Evelyn Leahy Hankel. Caroline's story and all pictures courtesy of the Van Dusen family collection



Back row (left to right) Curtis Trenchard, Jen Van Dusen, Sid Van Dusen, Florence Van Dusen Wadleigh, Dan McIntosh, Jane Crang Van Dusen, Hustler Van Dusen and Brenham Van Dusen.  
Middle Row - Cara Van Dusen Trenchard, Fannnie Dickinson Van Dusen and baby Lloyd, May Van Dusen McIntosh, Caroline Childs Van Dusen, Millard Wadleigh,  
Front row - Florence Van Dusen, Maude Van Dusen, Anita Trenchard, Winnie Van Dusen, and Arthur Van Dusen.



Astoria was barely a village of two frame houses and a number of log cabins and shacks when Adam Van Dusen first set his eyes and heart upon it. The year was 1847 and he had left his young wife, Caroline, in Oregon City with friends while he searched for a land claim in this new Western territory. The two, a handsome couple in their early twenties, had crossed a con-

tinient in an oxen-drawn wagon to find their destiny in John Jacob Astor's fur trading post town on the banks of the River of the West.

The very best way to tell the Van Dusen Story is through Caroline Childs Van Dusen's tale as told to her cousin, Judge Aaron E. Wait, who as a young man traveled west with Adam and Caroline in their "Steamboat" wagon.



## CAROLINE'S STORY

Mrs. Caroline Childs Van Dusen was the daughter of Lloyd and Amy Childs. She was born September 5, 1825 in Wayne County, New York. Her father was a farmer. In 1831 the family moved to, and settled in, Michigan. There in 1845 she met and married Adam Van Dusen who was of Holland descent. Mr. Van Dusen's health not being good in Michigan, he decided to emigrate to Oregon, and his young wife, being of pioneer stock was pleased with the idea. Aaron E. Wait, a cousin of Mrs. Van Dusen and then a prominent young attorney, had made up his mind to go west so they joined forces and provided themselves with a wagon, five yoke of oxen, one horse, and a good milk cow. This wagon differed from most wagons in that it had a deep bed in which was placed all of their provisions for the six months trip. Across the wagon bed projections were placed widening it sufficiently to admit beds being made

crosswise of the wagon. Aaron Wait's bed was in the front end and a drop curtain formed a partition. On the center cross piece was attached a little tea kettle boiler and frying pan. On this little stove cooking was done with great ease and satisfaction. Mrs. Van Dusen says many times she sat in her cozy kitchen on wheels, cleaned and cooked a bird, while the wagon moved along. On cold nights the little stove made their house very comfortable. They also had a little churn in their kitchen. The milk was placed in the churn each morning, and the motion of the wagon churned it so every evening they had fresh butter. In this way one cow furnished them with fresh milk and butter daily. Mrs. Van Dusen says she really enjoyed the trip across the continent every much indeed.

Their old friend and neighbor, the late Judge Lancaster, had a similar outfit and these two teams left

Michigan March 4, 1847 to join the emigration of that year at St. Joseph's River in Missouri. On leaving St. Joseph's their company consisted of 48 wagons, William Meek employed as guide. Their wagons were called the "Steamboat Wagons" on account of having the little stove pipes passing up through the top covers. They also had a tin reflector for baking bread.

There were many excellent people in the company. Two young ladies I remember especially, a Miss Clum and a Miss Ralston. Miss Ralston's step-mother, Mrs. Ralston, gave birth to a boy while crossing the Platte River. The baby was named Platte. Unfordable rivers were crossed in the usual way, by turning a wagon bed into a ferry boat. Strife and dissension occurred in the company, causing it to break up into sections that would separate and occasionally unite again as we traveled along until we reached Fort Hall. Here a part of our section decided to go to California, the other to Oregon. Judge Lancaster and his family were our travelling companions from Fort Hall to Oregon City. As we progressed, our oxen grew thin as grass was scarce, and some days we were compelled to travel all day without finding any feed for them, but we pushed along and finally reached the Cascade Mountains.

In climbing a very long and steep mountain in the Cascade range our team was, as usual, doubled up with Judge Lancaster's to take his wagon up first. This left my husband and me alone at the foot of the mountain. Shortly after, two Indians came riding up at full speed and stopped beside our wagon to look us over, talking to themselves. We were much frightened but pretended to be very brave, Mr. Van Dusen having his pistols and knives in his belt, and plenty of guns strapped on to his wagon which they examined as they walked around talking.



Cara Van Dusen

Mary Amy Van Dusen





At last the Indians turned their horses and rode away. In about an hour they returned and went through the same performance and left again. To our great relief we saw no more of them. Soon the judge returned with the teams to take our wagon up the mountain.

On the Barlow Road in sight of Mt. Hood we had heavy rains, making the road very slippery. Late one evening our wagon upset for the second time that day and as our cattle had found nothing to eat all day, the men had to leave the wagon on its side and go ahead with the stock in search of grass. We got out a few bedclothes, made a big fire, and sat up nearly all night. We could hear the brush crackling and wild animals screaming during the night. I suppose our fire kept them from attacking us. The next morning the men brought the cattle back without having found any food and we pushed on until late in the evening when we fortunately found grass.

We soon reached Oregon City and put

up at the Barlow Hotel. Having arranged my toilet and put on a new calico dress, I went to supper and every body declared that I could not have just crossed the plains for my face was not tanned a bit. After a few days we went to the private boarding house of Mrs. Andrew Hood and soon after that we found a house which we rented for the winter.

Early in the Spring of '48 we prepared to move down the river. About this time our late governor, George L. Curry (Governor of Oregon three times, first on resignation of Gov. Lane, second on resignation of Gov. Davis then appointed Governor by President Pierce in 1854) was expecting to marry Miss Boon. Mr. Van Dusen sold Mr. Curry his dress suit and I sold Miss Boon my wedding bonnet which was a lovely little bonnet of the gypsy style. They were married and took our house for their first home.

Mr. Van Dusen had already been down to Astoria and taken a land claim

*The Adam Van Dusen home at 16th and Franklin. The photograph was taken on January 21, 1874 and the occasion was the wedding of Florence Van Dusen and Washington Irving Wadleigh.*



on the Wallacut River (near Ilwaco, Washington) now owned by Mr. H.S. Gile. When we reached Astoria, we decided to give up the Wallacut claim and take the place now known as "Sunnymead" farm and owned by Colonel and Dr. Adair. Their home stands just where our little log cabin stood in 1848-49. We lived on this place one year, planting and raising a garden principally potatoes.

The winter of 1849 was extremely long and cold. Adair Creek, in which we kept our boat, a large one, became frozen up and we did not see the face of a human being for six weeks. Early one Sunday morning our dog barked and Mr. Van Dusen got up quickly to find the old Chief Walluski standing at our door. Chief Walluski was then living on Smith's Point or then Taylor's Point as it was called, across the bay from us. He had come across in a little duck canoe to the west side and walked up on the ice. He told us he had been watching the smoke from our cabin for several days and seeing none thought we might be memaloose (dead) so he came to see. We invited him to breakfast with us and showed him every respect. I remember this happened two weeks before Christmas. The Chief said if the ice remained until Christmas he would come and take us to Astoria. He came as promised and took us across the bay in his big canoe. We remained in Astoria two weeks and then our friends brought us safely home in a large boat.

This one year was long enough on the land claim so in the spring of '49 we moved to Astoria. At this time there were but two frame houses in Astoria — Mr. Welch's and Mr. David Ingalls'. We moved into one of the Shark houses that stood near where now stands the Parker House in Astoria. These houses were built by the men from the wrecked vessel "Shark". Mr. Van Dusen had to split out boards for the roofing and clinking for this house. We had no fur-

niture except what we made ourselves. Our bedstead was made by boring three holes into the logs of the house into which end and side rails of the bedstead were driven and fastened to one log on the floor. We were very thankful, however, for this humble home and soon made it cozy and comfortable. About this time, Mr. and Mrs. Truman P. Powers arrived in Astoria and we gave them house rent for the use of their cook stove. We divided or partitioned off our house by using "clisquides" (mats) purchased from the Indians. These mats were very nice and pretty, made from dried tules from three to five feet wide and of various lengths.

Many Indians were camped on the hills near our house and they seemed to keep up an incessant howling. When their Queen Sally was very sick, they constantly made nights hideous with their medicine performances. The Queen's slaves were in mortal terror lest she should die and they be buried alive with her according to tribal power. I became so familiar with the peculiar and varied music made by these Indians that I might have excelled as one of the magicians.

Our house stood near a little bay, the front of the house being three or four feet above the ground. Frequently a number of Indians would come from Chinook landing in the bay and then come up to our house and stand around our fire to dry out and get warm and often sleep under the house. One night an Indian baby was born under our house.

The following little incident might be of interest. I was always pretty handy with my needle and had made me a pretty hood, quilting it very nicely. Mrs. B.C. Kindred was visiting me one day and seeing this hood, offered me five pounds of butter to make her one like it. I made the hood. Butter was then 25 cents a pound. Time passed and we





Florence Van Dusen

built us a comfortable home in Uppertown (Adair's Astoria) and here in 1852 I was keeping boarders. By this time the California gold mines had made money plentifully and produce of all kinds was very high. One day Mrs. Kindred called and said "Well, I think it is about time we were paying for that hood. How much is it?" I said "Five pounds of butter." She replied, "Well, butter was only 25 cents a pound then, while it is worth \$1.50 now." "Yes," I said, "but the price of the hood was five pounds of butter." She laughed and paid the five pounds of butter. Mr. Van Dusen was the first person in Astoria to sell goods from shelves, The Hudson Bay Co having sold their goods from boxes.

My first child, Seth, died in infancy. My daughter Florence was next born (1851) followed by Cara, Brenham, Hustler, Lloyd and Mary Amy. Mrs. Florence Westdahl and Mrs. Mary A. Strobbridge live in Oakland, California. Mrs. Cara Trenchard, Mr. Brenham and Mr. Hustler Van Dusen, with their families live in Astoria.

In our travels across the plains, I remember an instance that happened at one time after our stopping for the night. It was usual for all the wagons to form in a circle as we came into camp. The object was, in case we were attacked by Indians we could all be together and if necessary in case of fearing an attack, our stock could be driven inside of the circle and each wagon tongue put upon the other wagon made a close corral then the men could stand guard on the outside. This night our cattle seemed restless and inclined to wander. The men were out with them all night. Finally they succeeded in getting them back to camp which was about daylight. Our cattle were always more restless when Indians were near. After looking over the stock we found several missing from different wagons, so of course some of the men had to try to get

them. After riding a long way, they saw the cattle and several Indians driving them away. Our men were shot at and one of the arrows went through Mr. William Steven's hat just grazing his head. The men fired into them with their rifles, which caused them to scatter and leave the cattle. Then they drove the cattle back to camp. By that time it was eleven o'clock. You can well

imagine our joy when we saw our cattle again. The men told their story and all thought it was a very narrow escape. The cattle were yoked up and hitched to the wagons and we started on our way again. Our cattle usually after feeding would come back to the wagons and lie down until about 4 o'clock in the morning when they would all get up to feed again.

The preceding story is given as told by Mrs. Van Dusen and is of great interest as coming from one of the very few actors in tragic times of our state's pioneer history. In later years, about 1864, Mr. Van Dusen moved his family down to their beautiful modern home built a little east of the original Fort

Astor. (16th and Franklin where old Columbia Hospital stands) This delightful home at once became the prominent house in Astoria and here this worthy family generously and cordially entertained their host of friends, including many prominent visitors to this far western city.

## AARON E. WAIT'S STORY

Although Mr. Adam Van Dusen's hospitable and genial presence is missed from around the family table, his charming widow still lives in this lovely home, surrounded by children and grandchildren as well as a host of friends who appreciate and delight to do her honor for her true and inestimable worth. Her days are much occupied with her children and grandchildren, yet she finds time to devote to Church and Charity and is a pillar of strength in all good works.

Mrs. Van Dusen's statement touching the journey to Oregon is remarkable for its minuteness and accuracy. I do not now remember the name of our Captain on that journey. I distinctly remember some incidents not mentioned by Mrs. Van Dusen. Before the company divided, in coming through the hostile Indian country, it was deemed necessary that several persons should stand guard when there came up a terrible storm of wind, rain, thunder and lightening which drove all the stock before it. The

guard followed the stock and when the storm was over, headed them and started them towards the camp and let them feed by the way, and had every horse, ox, and cow back to camp at sunrise.

One day in coming along, we saw Judge Lancaster's wagon standing near the road and his cattle unyoked and feeding. We would not allow him and his family to remain there alone so we turned in and stopped them. He had stopped to make some necessary repairs to his wagon; after that we traveled together. One afternoon, coming to good grass, we camped earlier than usual when along came several very noisy Indians who passed us. It was determined by one of the company to stand guard that night. When night came, the horses were staked within a few rods of the wagon, and the guard with his gun placed himself on the ground by the side of the wagon and looked steadily in the direction which the Indians had gone. About midnight a



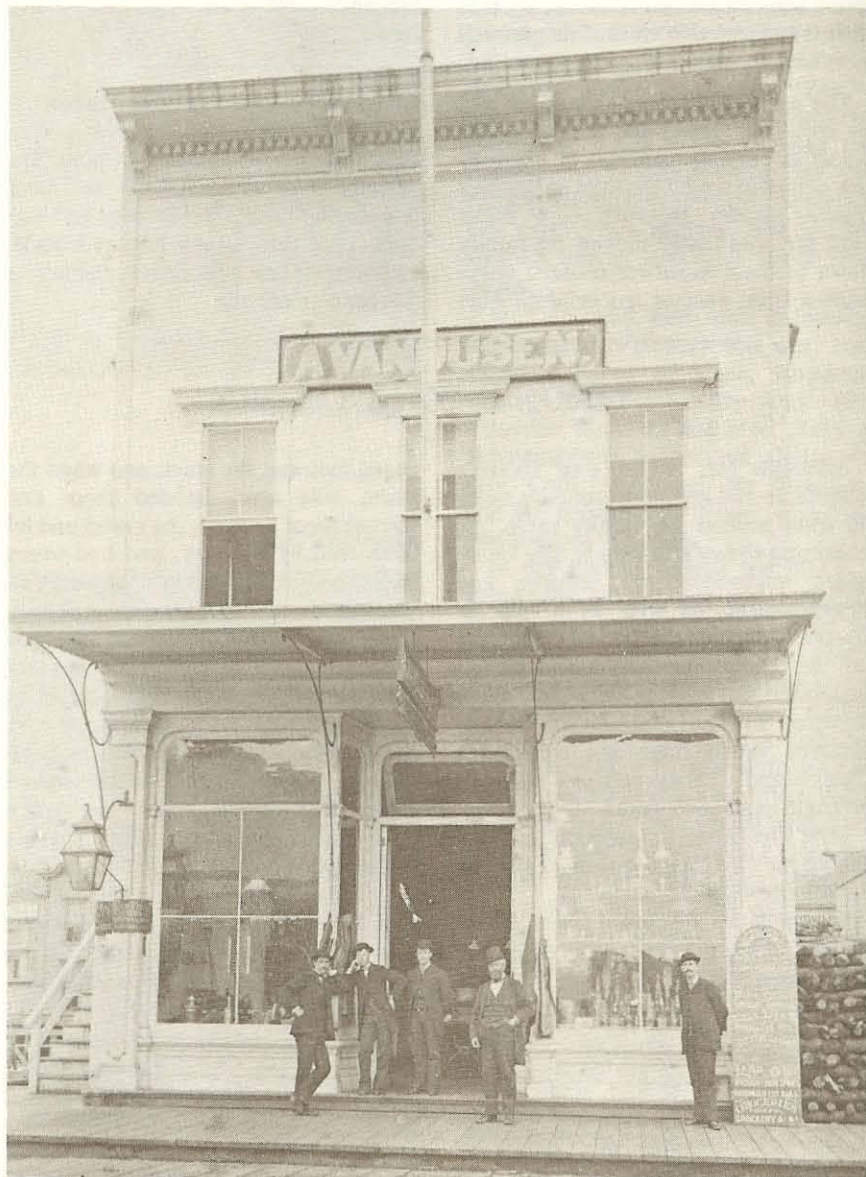
Lloyd Van Dusen



man was seen approaching the camp and he came nearer, went straight towards the largest horse. The guard did not wish to kill that Indian but was resolved that he should not have the horse. The Indian went near the horse must have caught a glimpse of a gun

pointed at him because he dropped to the ground in the grass. The guard looked to see the grass move when the Indian dropped and after looking for some time, went to the place and found that the Indian had gone—but he went without the horse.

(signed) A.E. Wait



## ADAM VAN DUSEN

Adam Van Dusen was born in New York State June, 1823. His parents were Simon and Mary Timmerman Van Dusen. He had two older brothers; Sidney and Gilbert Van Dusen who remained in New York and Chatanooga, Tennessee respectively.

No doubt Adam knew well the history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and John Jacob Astor's Fur Trading Post in the far west for his dream to follow these trails set him off to his life's adventure.

The first stop on Adam's trek across country was in Michigan where family friends were settled. Here he met and married Caroline Childs whose tale of their wagon train experiences preceded this account.

Upon arriving in the little Astoria settlement, Adam set about opening a mercantile store a much needed enterprise. Later Hiram Brown joined him in building on the N.E. corner of Jefferson and Cass St. The store was a great success and was soon enlarged, a branch store being opened later in the Uppertown (Adair) section of Astoria.

As soon as his son Brenham was of age the partnership became all Van Dusen and Adam left the mercantile business to Brenham while he operated the Insurance office which was to endure for four generations of Van Dusens down to great grandson Bill Van Dusen.

Mr. Adam Van Dusen prospered in business and held many positions of trust in the community. He was known throughout the State and called upon to serve on many committees as the State

and country grew. In Astoria he became a Notary Public and a resident agent for Wells Fargo Company in 1873. He was elected county treasurer in 1876 while handling his insurance business which included Norther and Queens and was the local agent for Liverpool, London and Globe Insurance. He was a member and Head of Royal Arch Masons and Director of the Interstate Realty Association.

Adam Van Dusen lived 37 years in Astoria as a leading citizen. His obituary carried in the DAILY MORNING ASTORIAN of June 25, 1884 was a eulogy to his life and career here:

He made thousands of friends as a genial and kindly man who always preferred to say a good word about a man rather than a harsh one. He prospered in business and held many positions of honor in the community and took prominent part in all that pertained to the growth of the country. At an early day he was the Indian Agent and discharged his duties with great satisfaction to the government.

He was a Wells Fargo Agent for twenty years and First President of Astoria Engine 1. Adam Van Dusen was an honored husband and father leaving his wife, Caroline, and six children in Astoria: Mrs. F.E. (Florence) Wadleigh, Mrs. C.A. Trenchard, (Cara), Mrs. D.A. (May) McIntosh, Mr. Brenham, Hustler and Lloyd Van Dusen. Services will be held at Grace Church and burial in Clatsop Cemetery. The CLARA PARKER will leave Main Street wharf at one P.M. for all who wish to attend.

*Adam Van Dusen and his son Brenham (center and right) stand in front of Van Dusen & Co. The insurance offices were upstairs while the mercantile store was on the main floor. The building was located on the northeast corner of Jefferson and Cass streets (10th and Duane). The sign says that they deal in pine oil, coal tar, ship chandlery, galvanized cut nails, groceries and crockery.*